

## December 17, 2009 - Pelosi says Rallying Votes for Troop Surge in Afghanistan Will be Obama's Job

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Pelosi says rallying votes for troop surge in Afghanistan will be Obama's job

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President Obama will have to argue his own case to House Democrats as he seeks support for a planned surge of 30,000 troops into Afghanistan, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said Wednesday, adding that she is finished asking her colleagues to back wars that they do not support.

"The president's going to have to make his case," Pelosi told reporters at a year-end briefing on the legislative session.

While the next round of war-funding legislation is not likely to be considered until spring, Pelosi said there will be a test vote in January on support for the troop buildup. Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich (D-Ohio) has said he will offer a privileged resolution next month calling for an immediate withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. The vote is likely to fail because of broad Republican support for the war, but it could reveal the depth of the schism between Obama and his fellow Democrats on the new troop plan.

"The president looked at, obviously, a number of options that he believed did not adequately change the calculus of what was currently going on in Afghanistan, and that the best way forward was to do this," White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said in his daily news briefing. "The president may not get the agreement of every member of Congress or every Democratic member of Congress, but will certainly make the case for why he believes this is the best path forward."

Asked if the administration was surprised by Pelosi's position, Gibbs said the speaker had in the past made statements "in opposition to adding more forces, as, quite frankly, a number of members of Congress have done."

The last real legislative effort to alter war funding came in June, when Republicans balked at the more than \$100 billion supplemental funding bill for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan because Obama asked Democrats to attach funding for the International Monetary Fund to the must-pass legislation. Most GOP lawmakers opposed the IMF funding as a "global bailout." With just five Republicans voting for the war measure, Pelosi had to beg Democratic colleagues who had long opposed the two wars to support the legislation, and she promised not to "ever ask them to vote for it" again.

Pelosi, who has warned of "serious unrest" among House Democrats about Afghanistan, said Wednesday that she intends to live up to that vow on the upcoming supplemental bill, which will require \$30 billion to \$40 billion for the additional 30,000 troops.

"We have to do this for the new president," Pelosi said Wednesday, recounting her conversation with Democrats in June. "Then he will come up with a plan, and then it's up to him to ask you for your support. What I've told the members is to give the president room, to listen to what he has to say, that we will provide the briefings and they will have the information. But I can't -- this, for members, is a vote of conscience. War votes are votes of conscience."

Once the full 30,000 troops are in place, the number of U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan will top 100,000, roughly tripling the number taking part in operations there a year ago. The buildup in Afghanistan has

left many Democrats disillusioned with Obama, who campaigned for the Senate in 2004 and the presidency in 2008 in opposition to the Iraq war.

Some anti-war liberals in the House and Senate have demanded consideration of the supplemental funding early in 2010 so they can be on record opposing the surge before most of the new troops are sent, probably in March. But Rep. John P. Murtha (D-Pa.), head of the Pentagon subcommittee that will first consider the supplemental appropriation, has conceded that, though a majority of Democrats probably oppose the surge, there will not be enough votes to pull funding for the effort.

For now, Pelosi said she is hoping the vote on the Kucinich resolution will meet the demands from the anti-war wing of her party. "There are many members in the caucus who are eager to have a vote soon on Afghanistan," she said. "This may satisfy that need. We shall see."

Asked how she would vote on the Kucinich resolution, Pelosi declined to answer.

Staff writer Scott Wilson contributed to this report.